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FIRST PERSON

The Pineapple Pioneer

New farming technique increases income and reduces erosion



Masud Ahmed showcases his contoured pineapple field in Hail Haor, Bangladesh.

“By following the contouring method, I could reduce erosion and improve my output of pineapples ... We had never seen fields like this before,” said Ahmed.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Masud Ahmed is the self-proclaimed “pineapple pioneer” of the Hail Haor wetlands region in northeast Bangladesh. When Ahmed started working with USAID in 2002, he recalls, “the other farmers called me crazy.” The pineapple field contouring

technique USAID introduced to combat soil erosion was unconventional and unpopular, at first.

Deforestation and poor land use has increased the rate of soil erosion in these wetlands over the last 20 years. The traditional practice of planting pineapples in vertical rows up and down hill slopes is particularly damaging. During the monsoon season, soil in these pineapple fields is exposed to a large amount of rainfall and is swept away to the lower-lying wetlands. The rapid accumulation of silt contributes to the loss of wetland habitats, which support diverse animal and plant species.

Photo: USAID

With USAID assistance, an experienced American pineapple farmer came to Bangladesh to work with local farmers to demonstrate horizontal contour planting for soil conservation.

The results caught the attention of even the biggest skeptics. Using traditional methods, farmers earn approximately \$1,800 per acre over 3 years. With the contouring system, farmers can make an up to 50 percent more in the same amount of time, with the same amount of land.

Ahmed’s yield nearly doubled after he introduced the contouring method. Since 2002, he has contoured 12 of the 25 acres he cultivates with plans to contour his remaining land over the next couple of years. Seeing his results, an additional 20 farmers, including those who had called contouring a crazy idea, are now applying the same technique to their own fields.